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AUTHOR Schardt, Molly; And Others
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ABSTRACT

This packet accompanies a slide series that introduces students to the art of Thailand. The packet includes maps, a chronology of Southeast Asian history, an essay introduction to the influences on Thai art, a 15-item bibliography for further research, illustrations of Thai ceramics, the slide list, slide descriptions, and slide script. (EH)

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TEACHER'S PACKET

The Elegant Art of Thailand

A Teacher Workshop on January 22, 1994

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Education Department, Asian Art Museum of San Francisco

Prepared by Molly Schardt, School Program Coordinator
Edited by Richard Mellott, Curator, Education Department
and
Nancy Tingley, Curator, Southeast Asian Art

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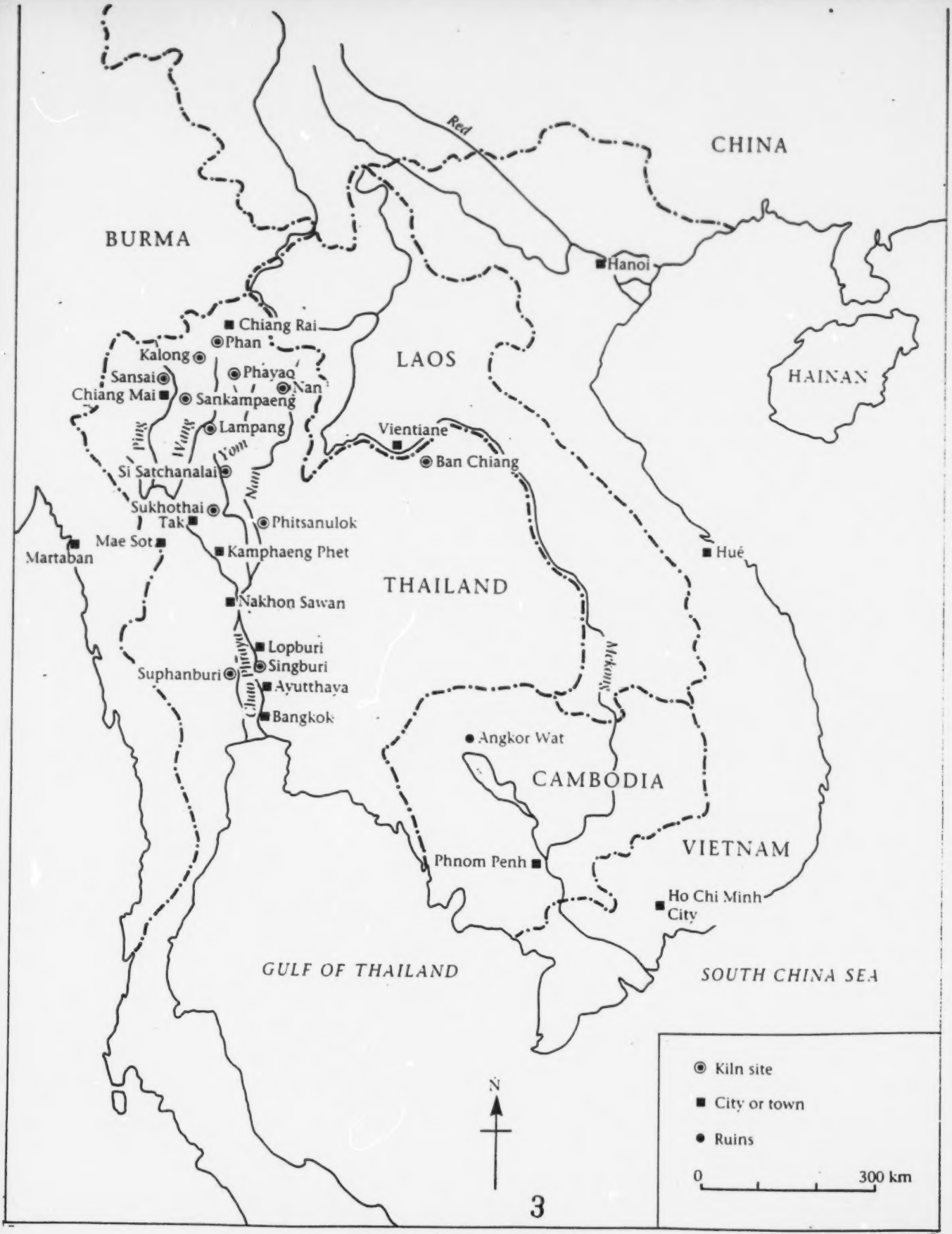

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Thailand—Location of Kiln Sites

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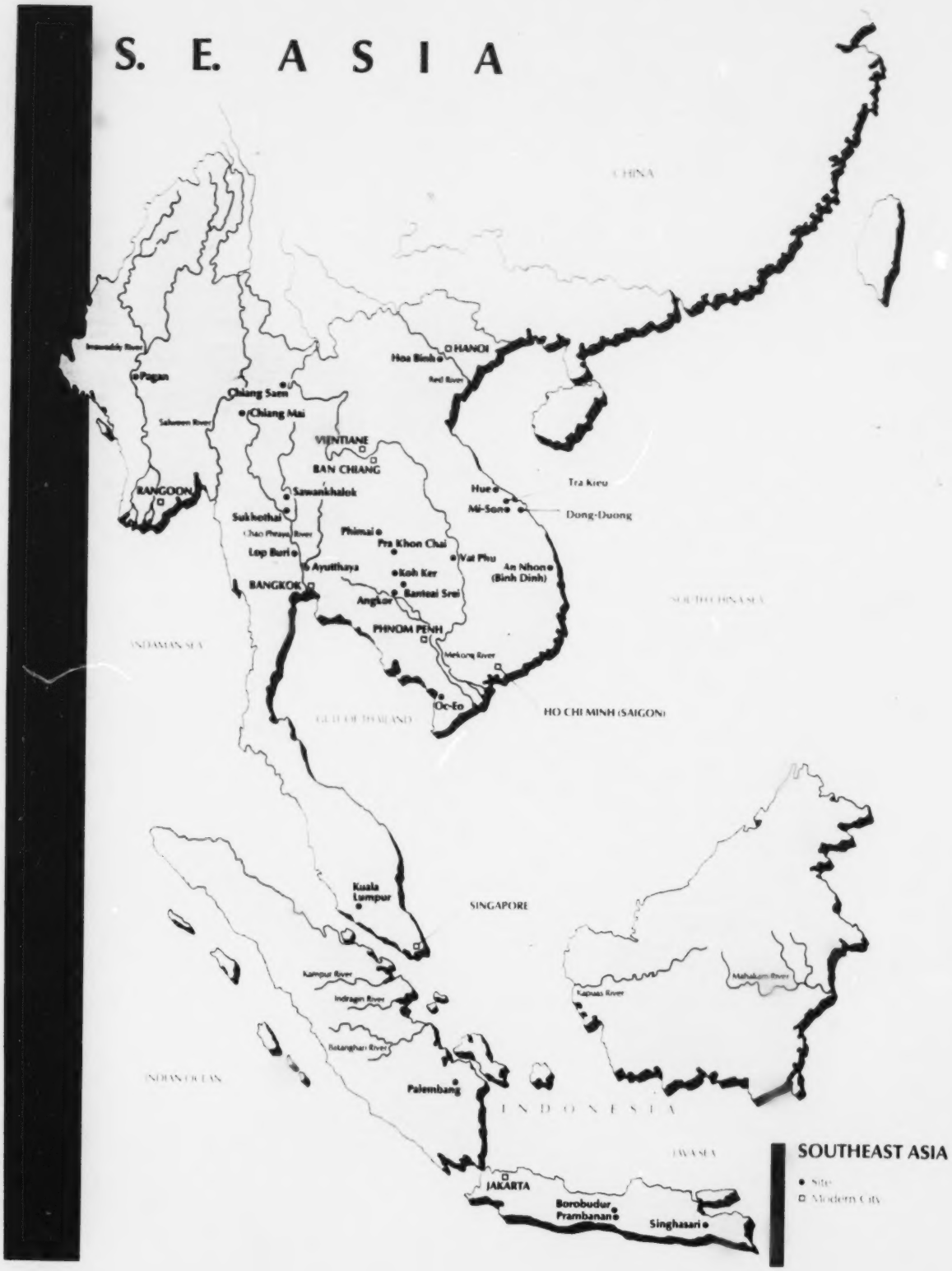

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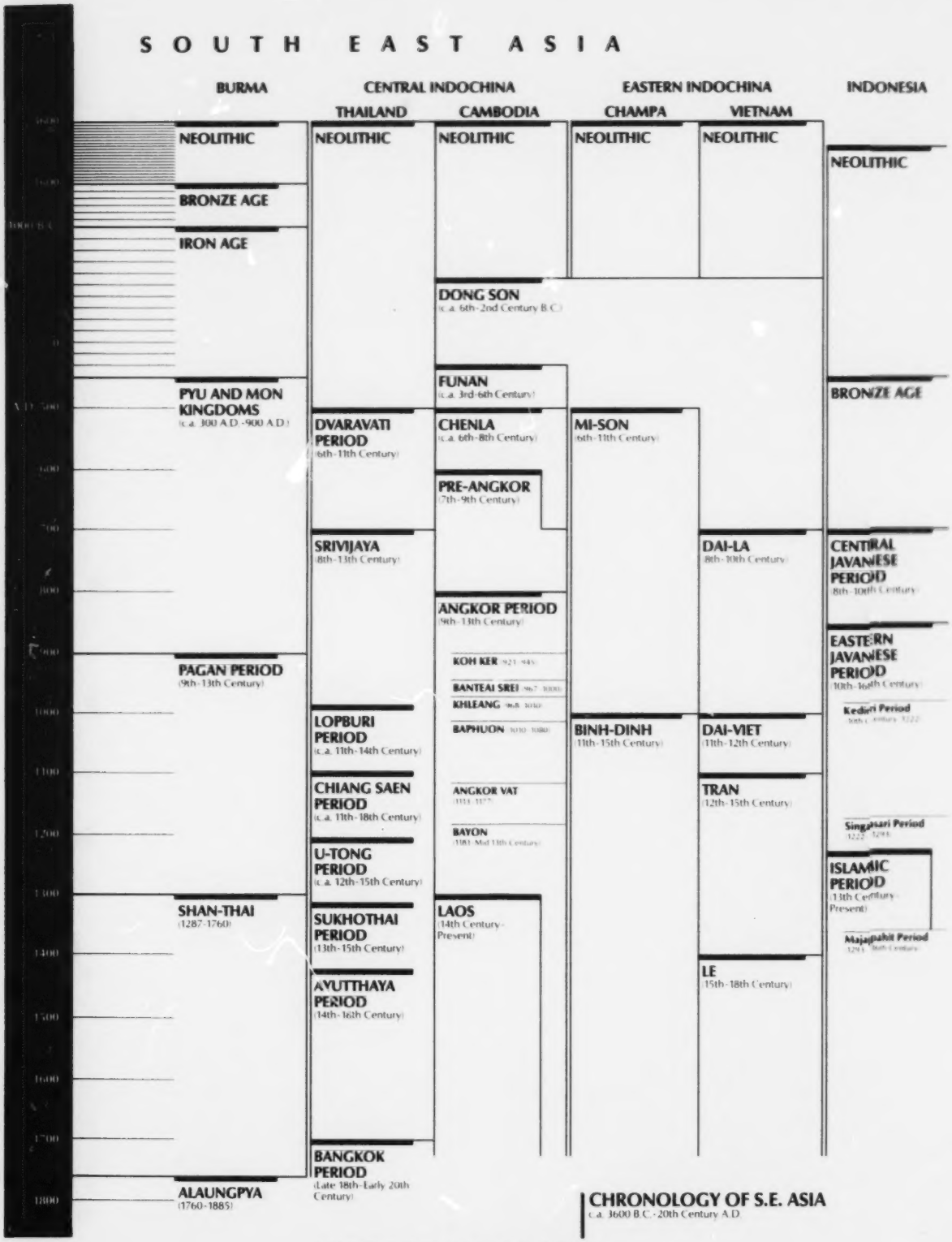

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The Elegant Art of Thailand

INTRODUCTION TO THAI ART

Thailand is now one of the richest, most politically stable, and modern of the nations of peninsular Southeast Asia. The bulk of this subtropical country lies between 20° and 14° latitude with a southern extension along the Malay Peninsula to 6° latitude. With its long coastline, broad alluvial plains, high dry plateau, and mountainous terrain with narrow river valleys, Thailand is endowed with a rich variety of land and resources. It is also part of monsoon Asia and experiences heavy rainfall and winds. The south-west monsoon brings Thailand most of its rainfall from May to November. It is followed by the north-east monsoon season, roughly November through April, which brings the dry overland winds from the northeast. Patterns of trade and agriculture developed around these monsoons.

Thai art reflects the country's varied terrain. The individualistic tendencies of the smaller, isolated northern communities, can be seen in the production of its independent kilns, and the separate schools of Buddhist sculpture. Further south, as the separate river valleys become wider and tributaries of the vast Chao Phraya River system merge, the potential for extensive population growth and the construction of monumental building complexes was realized. From the early historical period the populations living along or near the coast came into contact with foreign (particularly Indian) traders, colonists, and missionaries travelling on the monsoon winds. The impact of Indian religious, political, and literary culture molded the development of early Thai civilization and some of its most lasting early artistic creations.

HISTORY

BAN CHIANG PERIOD (4000 B.C.-A.D. 300)

In the higher plateaus of the northeast some of the earliest remains of settled populations in Thailand have been found. Archaeologists excavating at Non Nok Tha and Ban Chiang have discovered remains that document continuous habitation of the area since about 4000 B.C. Scholars are able to date these cultures and try to understand their lives by examining their pottery, one of the few durable products of a civilization. In the bottom layers of Thailand's archaeological record, the Early Ban Chiang Period dating to 3600-1000 B.C., excavators have discovered black or gray pottery with cord-impressed designs. Around 1000 B.C., in the Middle Period, the cord-impressed designs are replaced by incised and painted decoration. Light buff slip covers the darker earthenware body of the vessels. In the upper strata, or Late Period (300 B.C.-A.D. 200), the pottery is again coated with a buff slip as a ground for the brick-red linear patterns of spirals, circular meanders, cross-hatching, and stripes. Globular pots were fitted with flaring necks and sometimes footrings (see slide 1). Other ceramic items associated with this historical period include rather large, bead-like fired clay rollers (see slide 2) with carved patterns which were found in the graves of children. There is no evidence of their use, but it might be that they were coated with dye and rolled over cloth to produce a pattern fabric, but if so the resulting cloth has long since rotted away.

The early farmers of the Ban Chiang culture made pots of various sizes to cook and store their food and save seed for next year's crop; they also made tools to help them clear the land and hunt. Metal tools and ornaments have been found in Ban Chiang graves and at other sites in northeast Thailand from the Early Period. Only a few appear to be simple copper artifacts; most show intentional additions of tin to form bronze, a harder, more utilitarian alloy. Tools such as spear points and axe heads were cast in bivalve molds fitted with an additional core piece to create a socket for inserting the tool's wooden handle. Post-casting techniques of heating and pounding (annealing) were employed for final shaping and hardening. Ornamental pieces such as bronze bangles with bells were made by lost wax casting. This early Bronze Age

culture appears to have developed its sophisticated metallurgical techniques independently, without contact with the bronze cultures of the Near East or China.

Along with such man-made objects as these, archaeologists have found seeds and animal bones which document the earliest stages of agricultural and animal husbandry. Yams and bananas were propagated, planted, and harvested by the early Ban Chiang farmers in their small settlements as they gradually gave up the ways of the migrating hunter-gatherers. Rice may have been cultivated here independently of ancient rice-growing in India. Several species of wild rice still grow in the area, and there are indications of intentional wet-rice paddies worked with the help of domesticated water buffaloes whose bones are found in the Middle Period levels (see slide 13 for a much later image of this important beast).

INDIANIZATION IN THE EARLY HISTORICAL PERIOD

In the early historical period, the population of the geographical area today known as Thailand belonged to the race of dark, curly haired, soft-featured people known as the Mons, who are racially related to the Khmers in Cambodia, the Javanese in Indonesia, and the Chams in South Vietnam. Their civilization grew with the increased agricultural production that had been made possible by the metal culture and domestication of the water buffalo. As small communities of farmers were growing into larger villages and kingdoms, surplus food and resources were available for trade. Roman merchants appeared as early as the 2nd century A.D. The Chinese write of settled peoples in Champa and the kingdom of Funan in the 3rd century A.D.; this kingdom extended from its center in Cambodia across to southern Thailand. Legend tells how it was established by the marriage of an Indian prince or adventurer and a local princess.

Of all the traders, the Indians made the greatest cultural impact in this early period. Traders and missionaries brought the Indian religions of Hinduism and Buddhism into this area as they plied the seas in their ships driven by the south-west and north-east monsoon winds. Travellers set up colonies along the coasts throughout Southeast Asia where they could wait for the winds to change to continue their journey or return home. Indian colonialism was one of convenience rather than conquest. Through contact with Indian colonists, local

populations gradually were converted to Hinduism and Buddhism by association, never by force. Indian influence was also accomplished through the intermarriage of the foreign traders and the local population. Through these interactions the forms of Indian administrative and legal systems based on the supreme power of kings and a strong sense of social rank were learned and adopted by those local leaders already gaining power.

Indianization also introduced the Sanskrit system of writing and many new words were adopted for local use. It provided a fully formed, mythic cosmology, an epic literature, and a body of religious tales. Indian images and artistic formulas inspired native religious sculptors.

BUDDHISM

The spread of Buddhism played a significant role in the process of Indianization. Seafaring merchants comfortably journeyed beyond the boundaries of India proper, liberated by Buddhism from the extreme constraints of the Indian caste system which considered contact with "inferior" people to result in racial and spiritual pollution. Seamen carried images of the Buddha for protection on their voyages. Buddhist missionaries encouraged and participated in the colonizing of Thailand and other countries of Southeast Asia, establishing temples, *stupas*, monasteries, and Buddhist images in the area.

Buddhism originated in India and Nepal in the 6th century B.C. through the life and teaching of the Buddha--or "The Enlightened One"--who was born a prince in North India or Nepal. It was one of several religious movements of the time intended to reform the Brahmanic tradition. Like Brahmanism, its aim was the release from *samsara*, the cycle of rebirths caused by one's *karma*, the effects of one's good and bad deeds in former lives, but unlike the Brahmins, Buddha taught that liberation could be achieved in this lifetime. For the Buddha, the key to liberation was release from desire and attachment through meditation, discipline, and following the Eight Fold Path of right conduct. The radical notion that the samsaric cycle could be broken in this lifetime by one's own acts of will and devotion, circumventing the hierarchical caste system and rituals of the Brahmans, had profound implications for Indian society. That the Buddha managed to create a monastic system that essentially provided people of all castes the time and opportunity to devote themselves to a lifetime of study

and contemplation supported by the society at large (especially the local kings), was also revolutionary.

After the Buddha's death, different sects of Buddhism arose focusing and developing different aspects of the Buddha's teachings. A major division arose in the 3rd century A.D. between two branches of Buddhism, the Theravada and the Mahayana. The former has remained fundamentally faithful to the earliest Pali texts and the monastic tradition which emphasizes personal liberation. The latter centers on the aspect of love and compassion of the Buddha personified by the bodhisattvas -- semi-divine beings dedicated to helping all sentient beings achieve *nirvana,* enlightenment or liberation.

As the Buddha had not wished to be remembered as a god, no images of him were made for 300 years after his death. The faithful were exhorted to remember him by visiting the places where he lived and taught. Thus pilgrimage became a form of worship connecting the faithful to the Buddhist doctrine. If one couldn't go to India there were secondary shrines also considered sacred because they were reminders of the original places. The monument that universally acted as a reminder of the life and teaching of the Buddha was a *stupa,* a type of burial mound which held relics of the Buddha -- his teeth, bones, or ashes. Thus all *stupas* are sacred and worthy of veneration. In Thailand, *wats* (temple complexes) with *stupas* containing holy relics are called Mahathat, or "Great Relic" temples. Wat Mahathat of Sukhothai is an example (see slide 7).

The first images of the Buddha were made in northern and central India. Based on textual descriptions, they represented the idea of the Buddha, not his personal human form. It was a tradition that a Buddha could be identified by certain bodily marks, in particular a protuberance of the skull, called an *ushnisha,* which indicates his supreme wisdom; a whorl of hair between his eyes, called an *urna,* indicating his insight or ability to see beyond opposites; and prints of the Wheel of the Law on his hands and feet. Artists added elongated earlobes to represent that he had given up his heavy royal jewelry and the material life. The body of a Buddha would glow with his radiant energy, a quality depicted either by gilding the statues and/or by placing halos behind his head and body. In Thailand, this energy was also represented as a tall flame surmounting his *ushnisha.*

The important events in the life of the Buddha are indicated by symbolic gestures (*mudras*) and postures (*asanas).* In Thailand four postures are used to indicate four modes of embodiment: walking, standing, sitting, and reclining. The most common *mudras* found are the gesture of "fear not" with the hand(s) raised, palm(s) facing out (see slide 7); the teaching gesture, the same position with the thumb and forefinger joined; the meditation, gesture in which a seated figure holds his hands in his lap, palms up (see slides 4 and 5); the "earth touching" gesture, where the right hand is extended over the knee palm down, fingers pointing to or touching the pedestal, the gesture used by the Buddha to call the earth to witness his store of merit, his right to become enlightened (see slide 5); and the *parinirvana,* in which the Buddha reclines on his right side with his right hand supporting his head and his left arm along the side of his body, the pose he assumed when he lay down to die,

DVARAVATI PERIOD (6TH-11TH CENTURY)

The Mon Dvaravati kingdom arose during the 6th century with the waning of the kingdom of Funan. It dominated the lower Chao Phraya River Valley (the central area of modern Thailand). Another Mon colony, called Haripunchai was established in northern Thailand at Lamphun. The Mon also spread into southern Burma. The few architectural remains consist of rectangular stone platforms with the rubble of brick tower or *stupa* structures and fragments of stucco ornament. Most images are of the Buddha, while other Buddhist, Hindu, and some unusual, eclectic figures were also produced. Sculptors worked best in terracotta, stucco, and bronze, as the brittle limestone available to them tended to fracture easily. The gentle, rounded bodies and sweet, soft faces reflect the physiognomy of their creators (see slide 3).

The rounded faces have small chins, broad noses, and everted lips. The gently curving eyebrows meet in the center, creating a sinuous bow shape. The hair is rendered in large, distinct curls and covers the rounded or cone-shaped ushnisha which is sometimes surmounted by a taller cone or knob. While using the established hand gestures, Mon sculptors developed their own symmetrical figure types by often having both hands make the same gesture.

LOPBURI PERIOD (11TH-14TH CENTURY)

By the 11th century, the Mon's neighbors, the Burmese to the northeast and the Khmers to the west, were pushing into Mon strongholds. In the mid-11th century Burmese forces sacked the southern Mon kingdom and took the ruler, monks, and artisans back as slaves to help build monuments and establish Theravada Buddhism in his kingdom. Meanwhile, the Khmer empire had spread north beyond the Dangrek mountains into the plateau that is now part of modern Thailand. They conquered the Chao Phraya basin forcing the Mon to relocate to the north and west. Centered in Lopburi, the Khmer colony gradually spread north into Sukhothai.

Many monuments in pure Khmer style dating from this period can be found throughout the area. The great stone and brick edifices built by the Khmer rulers, who were followers of Hinduism until the late 12th century, were conceived as palaces for the gods. Ordinary people, and even the emperors, lived in wood, bamboo, and thatch dwellings. The vast temple complexes were laid out as cosmic diagrams centered on the main tower, the *axis mundi*, or center of the universe. Corridors sometimes linked the tower to smaller towers at the cardinal and intermediary directions. Where more structures were added they were always placed to conform with the diagrammatic scheme. The primary image was placed in the central tower. Walls, niches, and gabled doorways were covered with reliefs and three dimensional sculpture.

The sculptural style of the Khmer was generally more severe than the Mon Dvaravati style. Faces are squarer with a more horizontal brow line, full, straight lips and a strong, wide jaw line. A flaring diadem or plain band binds the hair at the forehead. Bodies were strong and columnar. Jewelled belts and sarong pleats are carved in low relief and present a pleasant contrast to the smooth surfaces of the body. Needless to say, this bold foreign style, enforced on the Mon craftsmen who were conscripted to work for the Khmers, had a strong impact on later Thai art. It can be seen most clearly in the U-Thong style sculpture produced by Mon artists shortly after the Lopburi period (see slide 4), but its reverberations can also be found in the later style of Ayutthaya.

SUKHOTHAI PERIOD (13TH-15TH CENTURY)

Meanwhile, over the centuries, the Thais had been gradually migrating south from southern China into the narrow valleys of the tributaries of the Chao Phraya and Ping River systems. Some of their compatriots to the east had earlier settled into Vietnam as the Dai Viet; others were moving south into Laos, and a western group into Burma. The Thai presence was known by the Chams by the 11th century. A Cham inscription mentions the donation of a group of slaves from Siam, the term used for the Thais by outsiders until the 20th century, to a temple in the 11th century. By the early 13th century the Thais were fully established in the northern plains area. Chieftains in the different areas formed confederations of their communities as population increased. An alliance of Thais in the north central area overthrew the Khmer government and established the Sukhothai kingdom in 1220. Another kingdom was established under King Mengrai in the early 13th century further north. At first it was centered at Chiangrai and later, after he overthrew the Mon at Lamphun, further south at Chiang Mai, the "new city." In the late 13th century King Mengrai and King Ram Khamheang met and formed a pact of friendship which enabled the latter to focus his army on the Khmer.

King Ram Khamheang, the third king of Sukhothai, was a powerful military ruler who was able to bring much of what is now Thailand under Thai control. Taking advantage of the time, he pushed the Khmer back to their heartland and then went on to seize the Malay Peninsula from the weakened Srivijaya Kingdom. He did not dominate the old Mon state of the lower Chao Phraya, which, as the kingdom of Lavo (the former Lopburi of the Khmer), sent its own embassies to China.

Ram Khamheang's son, King Lo Thai, was a very pious king who devoted his energy to establishing Theravada Buddhism of Sri Lankan orthodoxy as the state religion. His reign and that of his successor encompass what some call the Golden Age of Thai art (14th-15th centuries). Monasteries were established and refurbished. Wat Mahathat, perhaps originally a Khmer monument, was rebuilt by Lo Thai (see slide 7). This temple complex, like others, consisted of buildings of several types within a walled enclosure. The main temple is in the form of a cosmic diagram, composed of a large tower representing the 33 levels of existence in Buddhism surrounded by smaller towers located in the four

cardinal directions and four intermediary towers at the corners. The central tower with three tiered base rises to a lotus bud top crowned by a delicate spire.

Wat Mahathat also had an ordination and a lecture hall, large rectangular buildings with high ceilings supported by columns. The steep, sweeping wooden roofs and their superstructure have long since decayed, but the large stuccoed brick sculpture which was built into the back of the halls facing east remains.

AYUTTHAYA PERIOD (1350-1767)
and BANGKOK PERIOD (1767-PRESENT)

The religious kings, Lo Thai and his son Lu Thai, who built Mahathat and other monasteries, were stronger moral and cultural leaders than political and military ones. During the time of their rule, the kingdom of Lavo, governed by another group of Thai settlers, united with the kingdom of U-Thong in the lower Chao Phraya area. In 1347 the ruler moved the capitol south of Lavo (successor to Lopburi) and founded the kingdom of Ayutthaya in 1350. In 1349 he had already gained the submission of King Lu Thai of Sukhothai. The new capital, built at the confluence of two branches of the river system which had been joined by a canal, was a virtual island. The kings were pious Theravadan Buddhists who built a succession of imposing wats and patronized the making of Buddhist sculpture in a style which was a blend of the stylistic heritage of this culturally complex region. Situated south of the main agricultural area, the kings of Ayutthaya looked more to trade than to agriculture to enrich their kingdom. By 1438 the former Sukhothai kingdom was completely absorbed into Ayutthaya, so the ceramic industry that developed there was under Ayutthaya control.

The Ayutthaya period was prosperous and productive. Taking advantage of the territorial gains made by the earlier Sukhothai king, the Ayutthayan kings focused much of their attention to the south and the sea. Meanwhile Burma persisted in pushing at the western border and the kings of Chiang Mai pressured the kingdom from the north. Caught in the middle of numerous battles, the Sukhothai region suffered massive destruction. The king of Chaing Mai sacked the cities of Sukhothai and Si Satchanalai. The kilns at Phan may have been started at this time. In 1767 the Burmese army sacked the city of Ayutthaya and a new line of kings established themselves in Bangkok. Many of

the early monuments there were built with materials retrieved from the rubble of the old capital.

ARTS OF THAILAND

ARCHITECTURE OF THE WATS

In Thailand the *wats*, or temple complexes, were built as acts of merit by the rulers and community leaders. These walled enclosures were monasteries which included structures and functions for the laity as well as the monks. They contained different kinds of buildings to serve the ritual needs and spiritual guidance of both. The actual dwelling places of the monks were outside the walls.

The *wat* was and still is the focal point of Thai social life; besides being a place of worship it serves as a meeting place for the community and the center for education. For centuries the monks were the teachers of both religious and secular learning; they were also the counselors and healers.

The shapes of some of the buildings make references to Indian architecture as interpreted by the Khmers, the Mons, and the Burmese. The central towers generally represented Mount Meru, the center of the universe and the 33 levels of Heaven capped by the Paradise of Indra. With some modifications, they came to represent the 33 stages toward Buddhahood for the Buddhists. In Thai hands, the bulk of the temple was lessened by cutting into the corners to create a more cylindrical tower with strong vertical thrust while maintaining the symbolic horizontal divisions. These towers were built not only in wats, but also crowned the central building of the early palaces.

Chedi, or *stupas*, essentially memorial structures, originated in India as hemispherical domes surmounted by the square *harmika* and a shaft supporting a series of tapering parasols. In Thailand these monuments also became gracefully attenuated, rising in a pyramidal form to a slender shaft and tapering spire. Many other Thai *chedi* used the bell-shaped *stupa* form designed in Sri Lanka, the center of orthodoxy in Theravada Buddhism. In Thailand they were more elongated and they generally rested on taller, narrower, drum bases.

The most holy building was the *ubosot* or *bot*, the ordination and congregation hall for the monks. Following the holy texts, *bots* were

consecrated by eight boundary stones and can only be entered by ordained monks. The rectangular building was oriented to the east so the Buddha at the back faced the rising sun. The *vihan*, a similar rectangular structure, was built to accommodate the lay practitioners coming to worship and to hear sermons along with the monks (see slides 7 and 10).

The long, rectangular congregation halls, the *ubosot* and the *vihan*, were characterized by steep, broad overlapping tile roofs with decorated gables, ridgepoles, bargeboards, eave brackets, doors and windows. The large interior space had a high ceiling supported by wooden beams resting on two rows of lotus or water-lily capped columns. In the later periods these columns and the plastered brick walls were slightly inclined to avoid the heavier, more static quality of the perpendicular. In the Ayutthaya period, windows were only narrow slits, but, the use of lintel beams in the 18th century allowed wider, tapered windows which could be shuttered with ornately carved, painted, or inlaid panels.

Other structures included libraries for the scriptures; a large square building, called a *mondup*, which held a relic or important Buddha image; and a *prasad* building for use only by the royal family.

In the Sukhothai period many of the architectural ornaments were made of glazed ceramic, such as the *naga* finials for the barge boards (see slide 6) and the *chofa* or gable peak ornaments. Both had symbolic as well as decorative functions. The *naga* represented the rainbow bridge joining the mundane and sacred worlds. The triangular *chofa*, which means "piece of sky," was often modelled with the image of a heavenly being with hands folded in prayer, the *theppanom*. A building was not considered consecrated until the *chofa* was in place.

The ornament of later buildings was composed of gilded panels of carved wood or stucco, colorful glazed tile roofs, and doorway and gable figures modelled and covered with ceramic and mirror-glass tiles and sometimes pottery shards. The exterior of the walls were plastered white but inside were often decorated with detailed mural paintings. The aesthetic movement of Thai architecture, and of Thai art in general, is a movement towards lightness, attenuation, and colorfully ornate surfaces. For their size, these buildings soar with a graceful elegance; in the sunlight their tiled and gilded surfaces radiate color and light.

SCULPTURE

In the Sukhothai and Ayutthaya periods several schools of sculpture existed simultaneously. With the establishment of the Thai kingdom in the 13th century there were actually several separate regional areas held together loosely in pacts of friendship and allegiance. Each had its separate history and goals and thus also its separate aesthetic identity.

The fourth king of the Sukhothai kingdom, King Lo Thai, sent emissaries overseas to Sri Lanka to further strengthen and update the Theravada Buddhism in his kingdom. Using models from Pala India, perhaps transmitted through the state of Burma which had direct land ties to northeast India, models from Sri Lanka, and most particularly the descriptions in Buddhist texts, Sukhothai sculptors created images of the Buddha that are essentially poetry in bronze. His head is shaped like an egg, his nose is like the beak of a parrot, his eyes in the shape of lotus petals, and his chin like a mango seed. His body, too, is contrived from poetic metaphors: his shoulders and arms are like an elephant trunk, his torso like that of a lion, his legs like the legs of a gazelle, and so forth. The result is the appropriately unreal form of a supreme being. The graceful forms flow into one another to create a kind of poetic perfection. A depiction of the Buddha's calm yet energetic presence was sought with the composite forms and smooth, gilded finish (see slide 8 for an early Ayutthaya image made in Sukhothai style).

Buddhas, although the primary focus of the Sukhothai sculptor, were not the only images made. Hindu images also had a place in ceremonies of state and royalty. For the most part these images are a little drier and more stylized than the Buddhas. They wear crowns, jewels, and richly belted and elaborately pleated sarongs.

In the north, the state of Lan Na achieved a style similar to Sukhothai. Drawing on the styles of Pala India, perhaps directly through trade routes to the coast of eastern India, the images of the Buddha share some of the idealized and poetic forms followed by the Sukhothai sculptors, but with more substance and solidity. The bodies were thicker and the heads rounder. The face was serene with full lips, small, straight noses, and gently arched, clearly separate eyebrows. Later styles show contact with Sukhothai sculpture through greater attenuation of forms, hooked noses, and certain details of dress.

In the central Chao Phraya basin the U-Thong school reflected the influence of several centuries of Khmer domination. The Khmer style is felt in the slightly square faces, flat with broad noses, wide straight mouths, and horizontal brow lines (see slide 4). There is a softening of the forms of the Khmer style, while its sense of strength remains.

Some of the details of Khmer costume and jewelry were retained and incorporated into the later Ayutthaya period sculpture, such as crowned Buddhas and Hindu images. As in the later Sukhothai images, these deities wear slightly flaring cylindrical crowns, wide and flat necklaces, arm bands, jeweled belts, and variously pleated and looped lower garments. The Buddhas of the Ayutthaya period preserve certain Khmer and U-Thong forms combined with stylistic influence from Sukhothai. The latter can be seen in the attenuation of the figures, the hooked nose, and arching brows.

Sculptural forms become altogether weak and repetitious in the Bangkok period (1767-present), perhaps due to the religious conservatism of the patrons. Artists sought to copy images which had been proven true and effective. Changes in style or form were unintentional; individuality in the creation of an image was not a goal of the artist. Creative energy appears to have been directed towards the elaborate decorative surfaces. In the conservative climate of Theravada Buddhism, the forms of the Buddha, the principle subject of Thai religious art, remained the same. The essentially fundamentalist nature of the religion kept turning artists' attention back to the past, to the texts and the early models.

Nevertheless, Thai artist invented a few forms special to Thai religious art. The elongated flame atop the *ushnisha* is the Thai version of an iconographic element that appears in some Sri Lankan and Southern India statues. Beginning in the Dvaravati period, the "fear not" and "teaching" gestures are sometimes repeated in both hands, giving the image greater symmetry and the message added emphasis. Another original creation of the Thai artist was the sculptural image of the walking Buddha, which had previously been depicted in painting and then shallow relief sculpture. It appears first in the sculpture of the Sukhothai period. Also in the Sukhothai period we see the Thai elongated version of the flame surmounting the *ushnisha*, a concept more modestly presented by Sri Lankan and South Indian artists. Thai sculptors and architects were inspired by the notions of lightness, height, and radiant energy.

This can be seen in the attenuation of forms, delicacy of detail, and, eventually, in the use of inset glass to lighten and brighten the forms. Gilding and regilding new and old statues is an act of worship. A Thai art historian speaks not only of the radiance of the image but of the spiritual energy of the artist:

> By contrast, the stucco gables of the same school on the bot of Wat Khao Bandai . . . were done by a powerfully inspired artist whose spiritual fire found expression in flamboyants extending to the very tips of the tendrils and forcing them to dart about out of strict alignment.
>
> [Anuvit, Charernsupkul. *The Elements of Thai Architecture*, p. 120.]

In summary, Buddhist sculpture in Thailand reflects an essentially conservative tradition. While a few early sites include Mahayana images, most monuments are Theravadan. A few Brahmanical images were made to set the stage for certain royal and secular ceremonies. Indian Brahmanism still forms the basis for the cult of royalty. However, the body of Thai sculpture is predominantly made up of images of the Buddha depicted in a limited repertoire of forms, which were inspired by Indian, Sri Lankan, Khmer, and Burmese models.

CERAMICS

The ceramic industry that blossomed in the 14th-16th centuries in Thailand, was built on the foundations of an indigenous tradition and was inspired by the market place of international trade. Tradition lore has it that the sudden spurt of ceramic activity in 14th-century Thailand came about when King Ram Khamheang brought Chinese potters to Thailand at the end of the 13th century, after an official visit to the Mongol Court of the Yuan dynasty. However, archaeological evidence now reveals that Thai potters independently developed certain technologies allowing for increased production. Kiln construction steadily advanced as the cross-draft kilns of the 11th-13th centuries that were dug into river banks gradually evolved into more sophisticated free-standing brick kilns capable of higher firing. These more advanced stoneware kilns resemble earlier Thai kilns more than Chinese kilns. Thus scholars now suggest the presence of a substantial ceramic industry in

Thailand ready for the right circumstances to increase its quantity and variety of production. In any case, kilns in Sukhothai and its twin city of Si Satchanalai produced an abundant variety of wares from the 14th-mid 16th century until the neighboring Burmese raided, sacked, and destroyed these kiln towns in 1565.

The relationship between the wares of Sukhothai and Si Satchanalai and the sequence of technological development at each site was unclear until recently. It has been noticed that all Sukhothai kilns are of the free-standing type are found at Si Satchanalai. Although the site has not been excavated, there is no evidence of a development from primitive river bank kilns. All evidence indicates that the technology was established at Si Satchanalai and later copied at Sukhothai.

Until recently, scholars were unsure if the two neighboring kiln sites produced wares simultaneously. But cargo retrieved from sunken ships in the Gulf of Thailand exhibit the variety of ware which was being traded in the 15th and 16th centuries. Export wares from both the Si Satchanalai and Sukhothai were discovered together. The presence of datable Chinese wares in the recovered cargoes has allowed archaeologists to date the Thai ware, revealing that kilns at Si Satchanalai and Sukhothai were operating simultaneously.

Si Satchanalai earthenware kilns produced pots from about the 10th to the mid-16th century A.D. Stonewares appear to have been produced from c. 1200. The earliest ash-glazed pots are locally referred to as Mon ware, suggesting that the kilns may have been developed by the Mons of Haripunchai before the Thai dominance of the area. As the kilns were improved by extension in length and the addition of a brick chimney, more evenly glazed green-glazed bowls, plates, and jars with combed designs were turned out. The big step in kiln improvement was the building of free-standing kilns, of a similar domed and tapered shape, constructed of fired bricks. The fire box is recessed and the chamber inclined. These above-ground kilns could be expanded in size to substantially increase their capacity in this period of ever growing demand.

The demand for pots was also met by bringing the kilns of Sukhothai into production. However, fewer kilns were built at Sukhothai and production did not last as long. Perhaps, because the clay of the area was too coarse, requiring a coat of light slip before painting and glazing, the Sukhothai kilns could not compete successfully in the marketplace.

The first period of increased demand coincided with the urbanization of the northern plains area. The new population, energy, and vitality brought to the area by the consolidation and expansion of the Thai power gave a new impetus to the political, economic, and cultural growth. More ceramics designed for daily utilitarian use were needed by the population. Ceramics were also in demand for ornamentation on some of the many temples being built at this time. Whereas stucco and terracotta had been used for architectural ornament for more than six centuries, the use of glazed ceramic decoration was an invention of the Sukhothai period (see slide 6).

By the mid-14th century, when Sukhothai had been absorbed into the more powerful Ayutthaya kingdom, the demand for ceramics for export dominated production. Ayutthaya was strategically located in the lower Chao Phraya River system to engage in foreign trade which brought the kingdom prosperity and power. Some independent Sukhothai merchants also took advantage of the trade possibilities open to them through the port at Martaban in lower Burma, although they had to reach the port by a well-established overland route.

New styles of painted wares made for export most likely reflect Chinese influence. Bowls, boxes, plates, and jars were decorated in a variety of techniques with underglaze black designs (see slides 15 and 16), overglaze brown iron oxide, monochrome brown iron glaze (see slides 13 and 19), brown iron and white glaze (see slide 14), and combinations of underglaze black and brown iron glaze (see slides 18 and 20). Sometimes designs were first incised and then covered in with brown and white glazes. Applied clay decoration added variety to some wares. There were also Chinese style celadon green glazed monochrome pieces.

Vessels were usually round and wheel-thrown, but some were modified by paddling into faceted bottles or boxes. The usual bowls (see slide 17), plates (some quite large as in slide 16), and jars predominate. Lidded containers came in two basic forms: a full-bodied potiche with a flared, rimmed lid, and a two-part box with a convex, smoothly fitted body and cover. There are two types of the latter form, a "reliquary" box with a conical knob (see slide 18) and a rounded, fruit-shaped box with leaves and/or stem on the lid (see slide 20). Water droppers and *kendi*, or ewers, were made in abundance. A ritual function, sprinkling water for purification, may have been attached to the

smaller bottles (see slide 15) as well as the *kendi.* The *kendi* also has the utilitarian function of holding and dispensing drinking water. The imaginative potters often created these *kendi* in figural or animal forms (see slide 14).

Although the demands of foreign trade fueled the development of the ceramic industry, certain categories of objects were made for domestic use. Individual kilns specialized in different wares; one kiln in the Si Satchanalai area, for example, was known the doll kiln. Figurines were produced there in great numbers. It is unclear exactly how they were used, perhaps as children's toys, perhaps as offerings for the spirit houses. They are delightful in their variety and spontaneity. Most appear to have been quickly hand-modelled. The basic shape of an animal or figure was enhanced with deftly incised lines or applied clay (see slides 12 and 13). Most often the dried pieces were dipped in the glaze, leaving at least the base, and sometimes more, unglazed.

Common utilitarian objects made for the domestic market include bowls, plates, jars, and lamps in a number of shapes. Some of the 800 kilns at Si Satchanalai specialized in different types of lamps, thrown or molded. There are a number of lotus-form lamps some on pedestals, glazed with a pale green celadon glaze. A wheel thrown type has a flattened, globular body with a flaring spout-like mouth. There are celadon examples of this type from Si Satchanalai, but also examples from one of the more independent northern kilns (see slide 11).

In northern Thailand, a variety of small independent kilns operated in the narrow river valleys. Although they appear to have produced mostly, but not exclusively, for the local markets, their period of greatest operation, the 14th - 16th centuries, roughly coincides with that of the large urban centers further south. Most date to the 14th century after the consolidation of the area into the kingdom of Lan Na under King Mengrai. The collection of pots retrieved from a major burial site in western Thailand suggests that many of the northern kilns were trading their wares throughout the northern territory even if not overseas.

Kalong was the site of about 100 kilns which produced perhaps the most elegant of all Thai ceramics with their fine-grained white clay, rich in kaolin. Miniature and large vessels were thinly potted and covered with a glassy transparent glaze, which has acquired a fine crackle. Many are monochrome, such as a small, spouted, hanging lamp (see slide 11). The designs on the Kalong underglaze decorated wares are often bold, dense, and foliate in nature.

Other northern kilns are responsible for wares of different types. The Sankampaeng kilns, which are more remote than the others, developed their own monochromes with incised and stamped designs. Plates and heavy jars are typical. The Phan kilns produced plain, utilitarian wares such as plates, bowls, lamps, and jars as well as miniatures and figurines made of light colored clay (see slide 12). Celadon type glazes made with a small percent of iron were sometimes fired in a reduction atmosphere giving the characteristic green color and sometimes oxidized to produce a pale straw color.

Many Thai ceramics of the 15th-16th century have been retrieved from burial sites in Indonesia and the Philippines, and a number from a burial ground in western Thailand. Certain types functioned in a particular ritual way in these burials. For instance, the small brown jarlets (see slide 19) were always found near the head of the deceased in Philippine burials. This type of monochrome jarlet, painted jarlets, and the miniature boxes form a body of delicate delights. It is hard to imagine from the picture that the little mangosteen-shaped box (slide 20) is just over one inch high. Before being placed ceremonially in the graves, boxes might have been used for such things as spices or cosmetics. The jarlets, like the slightly larger jars, may have held coconut oil. Some pots held lime for chewing betel nut.

The designs on the painted wares exhibit for the most part a distinctly original character, even if they were directly inspired by Chinese underglaze blue. The large platter with fish design came close to Chinese wares in the orderly disposition of the bands of design and in the scrolling floral band. Yet even here we also see the sense of vivacious spontaneity characteristic of the Thai painted wares. Geometric designs such as horizontal lines, stripes, cross-hatching, dots, and triangles were sometimes used over all or in bands or borders. Foliate designs are also explored, from arabesques, to spiky branches, to densely packed tendrils. Fish and birds are conceived in lively patterns of lines and dots. The pots give forth an aura of innocent delight and delicate richness.

Thai ceramics represent the creative genius of the Thai people rising to meet the opportunities and challenges of the moment. Spurred by the lucrative trade opportunities beginning in the 14th century, Thai potters rapidly developed their ceramic industry, producing wares for home and abroad. The opportunity to provide ceramic pieces to several Southeast Asian countries was

there. With vigor and enthusiasm, Thai potters made kiln improvements and studied the market, taking inspiration from the Chinese blue-and-white and brown-and-white glazed wares that were popular. Thai artisans fashioned vessels and painted patterns expressing the particular light-hearted charm of the Thai people.

The Elegant Art of Thailand

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EXAMPLES OF GEOMETRIC PATTERNS
ON THAI CERAMICS

ASIAN ART MUSEUM OF SAN FRANCISCO
THE JAMES AND ELAINE CONNELL COLLECTION

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

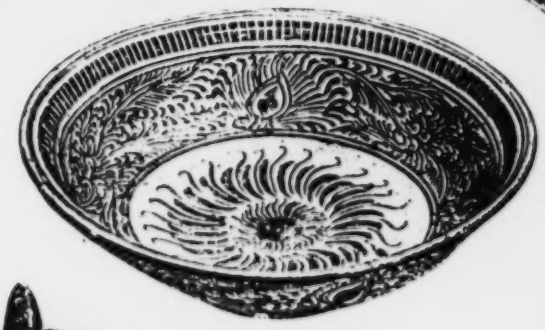
EXAMPLES OF FOLIATE DESIGNS ON THAI CERAMICS

Incised outlines and glazed designs

Underglaze painted designs

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

fish with foliate borders



peacock feathers

phoenix

raptor

mandarin ducks

Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, The James and Elaine Connell Collection

The Elegant Art of Thailand

SLIDE LIST

1. **Storage Vessel**
Ban Chiang culture,
3rd century BC-
2nd century AD
Thailand
Earthenware with red
painting on buff ground
H: 14.5 cm Diam: 14.5 cm
1990.310

2. **Five Rollers and One Stamp**
Ban Chiang culture,
3rd century BC-
2nd century AD
Thailand
Earthenware
From left to right:
1989.34.2 (a)
L: 4 cm Diam: 2.2 cm
1989.34.2 (b)
L: 5.1 cm Diam: 2 cm
1989.34.2 (c)
L: 8.6 cm Diam: 2 cm
1989.34.2 (d)
Ht: 3.5 cm Diam: 4 cm
1989.34.2 (e)
L: 3.9 cm Diam. 1.8 cm
1989.34.2 (f)
L: 7.6 cm Diam: 2.7 cm

3. **Bodhisattva Head**
Dvaravati period
(7th century)
Ku Bua, Thailand
Stucco; H: 6"
W: 4 7/8" D: 4 1/2"
1989.6

4. **Buddha Seated in Meditation**
13th century
Central Thailand
Bronze; H: 16 3/8";
W: 12 1/2"; D: 7 1/4"
71 S4

5. **Votive Plaque (Phra Pim)**
14th-15th century
Sukhothai, Thailand
Terracotta; H: 8.5 cm
W: 5.4 cm D: 1.4 cm
1991.311

6. **Naga Finial**
14th-18th century
Sukhothai, Thailand
Stoneware ; H: 59.1 cm
W: 14.3 cm D: 27.5 cm
1990.184

7. **Wat Mahathat**
14th century
Sukhothai, Thailand
Laterite, brick, stucco
Photo: © Nancy Tingley

8. **Walking Buddha**
c. 16th century
Ayutthaya, Thailand
Bronze; H: 25";
W: 8"; D: 6"
B60 B221

9. **Hell Scene from a Buddhist Manuscript**
dated 1844
Thailand
Ink and colors on paper
H: 5 1/4"; W: 27 3/4"
1993.10

10. **Wat Phra Keo**
dated 1782
Bangkok, Thailand
Wood, glass, tile
Photo: © Nancy Tingley

11. **Hanging Oil Lamp with Three Handles**
14th-16th century
Kalong, Thailand
Stoneware; H: 6 cm
W: 7 cm Diam: 8.5 cm
1989.34.10

12. **Reclining Cat**
15th-mid 16th century
Phan (?), Thailand
Stoneware; H:3.3 cm
W: 2.7 cm D: 6 cm
1989.34.15

13. **Bull and Rider**
14th-mid 16th century
Si Satchanalai, Thailand
Stoneware; H: 11 cm
W: 6.6 cm D: 10.1 cm
1989.34.89

14. **Spouted Bottle (*Kendi*) in the form of a Rooster**
14th-16th century
Si Satchanalai, Thailand
Grey stoneware; H: 21 cm
W: 12.9 cm D: 21.7 cm
1990.154

15. **Male Figure**
15th-16th century
Si Satchanalai, Thailand
Stoneware; H: 18.5 cm
W: 9 cm D: 10 cm
1990.120

16. **Platter with Fish and Arabesque Design**
15th-16th century
Si Satchanalai, Thailand
Gray stoneware; H: 8 cm
Diam: 38.4 cm
1990-167

17. **Bowl with Everted Rim**
14th-mid 16th century
Si Satchanalai, Thailand
Stoneware
H: 9 cm Diam: 18.2 cm
1990.109

18. **Covered Box with Raptor Design**
14th-mid 16th century
Si Satchanalai, Thailand
Stoneware;
H: 11.5 cm Diam: 10.8 cm
1989.34.29

19. **Gourd-shaped Jar**
16th-17th century
Si Satchanalai, Thailand
Stoneware; H: 10.2 cm
Diam: 7 cm
1989.34.85

20. **Miniature Covered Box**
14th-mid 16th century
Si Satchanalai, Thailand
Stoneware; H: 3.3 cm
Diam: 2.9 cm
1990.144

The Elegant Art of Thailand
SLIDE DESCRIPTIONS

1. **Storage Vessel,** Ban Chiang culture, 3rd century BC-2nd century AD
1990.310

This storage vessel from the Ban Chiang culture of Northeastern Thailand is not very large, only about 7 inches tall. It may have been used to store seeds by the early agricultural people who made it. Ban Chiang pots with painted spiral designs like this were made late in the culture which spanned the 4th millenium B.C. to the 3rd century A.D. While earlier pots were decorated with cord-pressed or incised patterns, these later vessels were covered with a buff-colored slip and painted with red earthen pigment with strong even lines creating curvilinear, often spiral designs. Here pairs of spirals facing each other form leaf- or heart-shaped units. Triangular areas within and between the elements are filled with solid color or stripes. The globular body with a narrow, flaring rim was formed from a cylinder of clay beaten into shape by a paddle and mushroom-shaped anvil, a technique still used in the area.

These pots served many utilitarian needs and also assumed a ritual function. Numerous pots, usually found broken, were placed in burials, usually at the head, chest, and foot levels of the body.

2. **Five Rollers and One Stamp,** Ban Chiang culture, 3rd century BC-2nd century AD
1989.34.2 (a-f)

Archaeologists who have found these objects in tombs of the later period of the Ban Chiang culture believe them to be rollers which were carved to imprint designs on some sort of surface. (A stick inserted through the center

could have been used to hold and direct the roller across the surface.) Of these five rollers, three were carved so as to leave simple bands of raised clay which would make parallel lines of varying width when rolled over a surface. On another roller, the bands have become wavy lines. The fifth has a more complex design of groups of arched parallel lines, four parts on one side and three on the other. There is also a stamp of concentric circles.

The function of these clay tubes with carved designs is still a mystery. They do not seem to have been used to impress patterns in clay as no examples of artifacts so decorated have ever been found. Perhaps they were used to created printed designs on textiles which have rotted away over the centuries.

Interestingly, rollers like these have been found most often in the graves of children one to six years old. This occurrence in burials of children too young to have used them makes us wonder what in fact was their significance. It is hard to believe they were made simply as toys or beads and not designed to create linear patterns on some kind of surface.

3. **Bodhisattva Head**, Dvaravati period (7th century)
1989.6

Reflecting the influence of Indian civilization, artifacts from later centuries often represent Hindu or Buddhist ideas. Stucco images like this head were made as architectural decoration on Buddhist monuments beginning in the Dvaravati period (6th-8th centuries). Like the stone images placed inside the shrine, these images show the Mon people's interpretation of Indian Gupta style figures which had hair in tight curls, arching eyebrows, and fat "bee stung" lower lips. Modifications to correspond to Mon physiognomy include the fuller everted lips, broad noses, and small chins. The joining of the eyebrows over the ridge of the nose in a sinuous arching line and the slightly raised outline of the mouth represent other stylistic choices. Although broken, this fragment of a typical Dvaravati head shows remnants of an elaborate headdress or crown indicating that it belonged to a bodhisattva figure rather than a Buddha. Bodhisattvas are important secondary deities, Buddhas-to-be, found in Buddhist art and religion.

The stucco consisted of lime and sand or other gritty material mixed together with water to form a stiff paste. Perhaps some kind of animal or plant

glue was added to the mix. It was plastered over a roughly modelled terra cotta armature with the details built up and carved to complete the images. The figures or panels were then affixed to the sides or in niches of the brick shrine structure. Images include episodes from the Buddha's life as well as figures of minor deities, teachers, or even demons. The heads, which were more substantial, survive in greater numbers than the thinner bodies which have disintegrated with the crumbling of the brick walls to which they were attached.

4. **Buddha Seated in Meditation,** 13th century
71 S4

This seated bronze Buddha represents the Buddha in meditation as indicated by the position of his hands, placed palm upward in his lap. It dates from the 13th century, at the close of the Lopburi period when much of central Thailand had been dominated by the Khmer, the powerful ruling dynasty of neighboring Cambodia. Stylistically, therefore, the image reflects both the Mon and Khmer images. This is seen especially in the face whose full features and sinuous eyebrows are similar to those of the Dvaravati period, but the severe, rectilinear quality created by the strong horizontal hairline and the square jaw are characteristic of Khmer art.

In showing the usual marks of the Buddha the artist has created a special form for the *ushnisha*, the bump on the Buddha's head which designates supreme wisdom. Here it has taken on a conical form topped by either a jewel-shaped or flame-shaped extension to indicate the radiant energy of the Buddha. The spiraling shape of the *urna*, or spot between his eyes, is also unusual. The Buddha has long earlobes, stretched from many years of wearing heavy earrings which he took off when he left his princely life in the palace to pursue the spiritual life.

Bronze images of this size were made to be placed inside the sanctuary of the temple structures. Thai artists favored the "lost-wax" method of casting bronze. Images were sculpted in soft wax over a roughly shaped core of unfired clay. Both additive and subtractive techniques could be used to achieve the desired form. When the wax model was completed, it was coated first with a layer of fine clay which would pick up the detail, then with additional clay containing rice hulls and straw for reinforcement. After the clay hardened, the

wax inside was melted, leaving a hollow clay mold into which molten bronze could be poured to cast the image. This complex process involved the cooperation of many people.

5. **Votive Plaque (Phra Pim),** 14th-15th century
1991.311

Followers of the Buddha made pilgrimages to places deemed sacred because of their importance in the Buddha's life and teaching. Sometimes at important religious shrines pilgrims could buy small votive plaques, flat clay or metal tablets with holy images in relief. These seem to have served both as souvenirs and as inexpensive temple offerings for those who could not afford to commission major statues. The plaques were formed by pressing clay into a mold and peeling it free when it had dried a little.

This votive plaque shows the Buddha sitting in an ornate decorative niche which could represent a *stupa* with its crowning spire. It is as if the plaque depicts a sculpture set in the base of a stupa. The Buddha's features recall the softness of the faces of the Mon-Dvaravati images although the plaque dates from the 14th -15th centuries, in the later Sukhothai period, after the Thai from southern China had established themselves as rulers of Thailand.

The Buddha sits in the meditation posture with his hand position indicating the moment in his life when he became enlightened. His left hand is resting in his lap, palm up, in the gesture of meditation, while his right hand reaches forward over his knee to call the earth to witness that he has the right to become enlightened. It is called the earth-touching gesture. This pose is a reminder of the place, Bodh Gaya in India, of the Buddha's enlightenment. It is one of the Four Great Events in the life of the Buddha, each represented by the place where it occurred: his birth at Kapilavastu, his enlightenment at Bodh Gaya, his first preaching at Sarnath, and his death at Kushinagara. According to the Pali texts (the religious texts followed by the Theravada Buddhists), the Buddha, who did not want to be worshipped, authorized pilgrimages to these places to help his devotees remain faithful to the teaching.

6. **Naga Finial,** 14th-18th century
1990.184

This imposing composite beast represents the naga, a powerful dragon-like spirit of the waters. They are also the guardians of subterranean treasure. Nagas figure prominently in the folk lore and religions of Southeast Asia where torrential monsoon rains and rushing rivers that overflow their banks are commonplace. The waters, which brought fertility and thus prosperity, but also destruction, needed to be respected and propitiated. This fierce, awesome naga has a scaly body, a curly mane, horns, sharp teeth, and short but powerful legs with clawed feet. He wears a gorgeous jeweled collar.

Glazed clay, like stucco, was sometimes used for architectural decoration. This large ceramic sculpture was made as the terminal piece of the roof of a wooden or brick monastic structure. The naga's serpentine body would have formed the arch. Aside from the shrine proper and stupa (or *chedi*) structures, which were made of stone and brick, there were also large wooden, or part wooden, meeting and teaching halls at the monasteries. Most of these structures at the older sites have disintegrated with time or were destroyed in warfare, but some of these more durable ornaments have survived. The dark clay body of this piece, covered with white slip and painted designs in black iron under a clear glaze, indicates that it was made in northern Thailand at the site of Sukhothai. Although most such pieces were made for use in Thailand, at least one similar piece had been exported and was discovered in southern Sulawesi.

7. **Wat Mahathat**, Sukhothai, 14th century
Photo: © Nancy Tingley

Thai architecture was rarely constructed of stone. During the period between the 11th and 13th centuries when the Khmer (Cambodian) empire had expanded well into central and northern Thailand, some stone temples and *stupas* were built. But most Thai structures were built of brick. Temples sometimes had foundations of soft laterite stone with brick superstructures. Here you can see the brickwork of some of the structures, and the laterite stone structures in Khmer style.

The central complex of Wat Mahathat seen here has an elegantly elongated central tower capped by a lotus bud form and spire surrounded by eight smaller towers. It represents the restoration and renewal of an older complex undertaken in the middle of the 14th century by king Lo Thai. The nine structures sit on a large stone platform decorated with relief sculpture of Buddhist monks standing in adoration. There is a difference in style between the four towers in the cardinal directions and the four at the corners. The former are made of stone and reflect the Khmer style. Perhaps they are even remnants of the original structure built during the time of Cambodian domination of the area. The other four towers are built of brick and follow the style of Srivijayan building from the Malay Peninsula. Thus the buildings reflect the fact that since the late 13th century the Thai power and dominion extended over the former Khmer and Srivijayan empires.

The *chedi*, or *stupas*, in this walled complex are funerary monuments built to hold the ashes of the princes who ruled there. Some of these are in the bell-shaped form inspired by the stupas in Ceylon.

The columns and broken walls are the remains of the large ordination and meeting halls of the monks and laity. In the distance on the right, you can see the head of one of the colossal brick and stucco Buddhas which decorated the outside of another kind of shrine. Some of these images are over 300 feet high.

8. **Walking Buddha**, c. 16th century
B60 B221

Images of the Buddha walking are unique to Thailand. This posture is one of four in which the holy presence is presented, the others being seated, standing, and reclining. In general, the walking Buddha signifies the journeying of the Buddha in order to bring his message to all beings. Here the Buddha's left heel is raised, his weight is on his right foot, and his right hand is raised in the gesture of reassurance, or "fear not."

The image is not meant to represent the Buddha in his ordinary mortal form, but is constructed from idealized parts according to the Pali Canon, scriptures of Theravada Buddhism, where the 32 marks by which the super being can be identified are enumerated. Some of them are: flat or "level" feet,

imprints of wheels on the soles of his feet and palms of his hands, projecting heels, long fingers and toes, legs like those of an antelope, long arms which reach to his knees, and a complexion the color of gold (most bronze images were originally gilded), a torso like a lion's, a soft, hairy mole between his eyes, and a protuberance at the crown of his head.

The style of this graceful, sinuous image from the central Thai capitol of Ayutthaya shows the influence from Sukhothai art to the north where following Sanskrit poetic imagery the Buddha's arms are like the smooth rounded trunk of an elephant, his head the shape of an egg, and his nose like a parrot's beak. Also characteristic are the elegantly arched eyebrows meeting in a point at the bridge of the nose.

9. **Hell Scene from a Buddhist Manuscript**, dated 1844
1993.10

Painting as well as sculpture was used to extol the message of the Buddha. Some are wall paintings, others can be found in book illustration. Thai books were typically constructed of palm leaves in the long, narrow format of ancient Indian books. The books were placed in front of the reader and opened upward. In time the separate palm leaves were replaced by accordian-pleated paper, but the long, horizontal pages were still read in the same way.

This scene is an illustration from a nineteenth century manuscript that tells the story of Phra Malai, a monk who gained the ability to fly and visit Heaven and Hell because of the merit he accumulated from his devotion and meditation. This picture shows him visiting Hell. The composition is divided into three sections by landscape elements. Starting on the left we see a man and woman (adulterers being punished) climbing a tree trying to escape a vicious dog and a man with a spear. The woman has gotten away but is being attacked by a vulture. In the middle section, at the top, a man is being thrown head first into a vat of boiling liquid with another person burning in the fire beneath it. Below, a man lying down is being attacked by a dog and a long worm-like creature. To the right, a pair of animal-headed demon musicians make noise while another dances. (One head has been cut out of the page to use for medicinal purposes, as sometimes happened with these old manuscripts.) In

the third section, emaciated bodies of the dead reach up in prayer to Phra Malai, who is flying above, beseeching him to warn others of the horrors of hell and of the need to be good.

Although the subject is gruesome, the painting is delicate and colorful. The figures are painted in outline with patterned musculature or emaciated rib cages and filled in with flat colors. There is no shading. The landscape and background trees, on the other hand, are painted in a more illusionistic style influenced by Western painting, with soft, blended brushstrokes and the use of shading and highlights.

10. **Wat Phra Keo**, Bangkok, dated 1782
Photo: © Nancy Tingley

By the 18th century, the capitol of Thailand had been moved south to Bangkok, the result of devastating wars with Burma, culminating with the Burmese sacking the previous capitol of Ayutthaya in 1767. Temples made of wood from this more recent era are still extant, soaring with an airy lightness achieved by slender columns, walls that slope slightly inwards, and steeply pitched roofs.

Typical of the indigenous architecture are these steep rectangular roofs in overlapping segments, the central panel on top, descending towards the gabled ends. The entrance seen here is at the eastern end of the building. The gable above is ornately decorated with gilded panels depicting the winged Garuda. The edge of the roof is covered by a bargeboard designed as a gilded serpentine form with flamboyant terminals. In earlier times, these decorative elements were sometimes made of clay, such as the Naga finial shown in slide 6. So although there is much that is new and shiny in the materials used -- mirrors, ceramic tile decoration, and gilding -- many of the forms have ancient precedents.

Many people go to the temple to worship the Buddha. They bring flowers and fruit and light incense as offerings. There are buildings where the laity can gather with the monks to hear sermons.

11. **Hanging Oil Lamp with Three Handles**, 14th-16th century
1989.34.10

As we have seen, clay was used by the Thai artists to embellish their stone, brick, and wooden buildings. It was also used for numerous smaller objects made to be used in everyday life. This small container, shaped like a flattened ball with a flaring spout, is an oil lamp. It was hung by the three carefully made disc-shaped lugs mounted on the top. Like a candle, which burns wax, these lamps used a fiber wick to draw a small amount of oil from inside the lamp to the flaring mouth of the spout, which when lit produced a warm yellow light.

Light, like water, has symbolic significance in most religions where it represents spirit and consciousness. In Buddhism the name "the Buddha" means "the Enlightened One." It was said that one who lit a lamp to the Buddha would be reborn with "unfailing eyesight, brilliant insight."

Made at Kalong, one of the smaller kilns in northern Thailand, this beautifully designed, carefully constructed, and sensitively glazed pot is a little jewel. The Kalong clay is finer than that found at most other Thai kilns and contains a high proportion of kaolin which produces a refined, white stoneware body. The transparent glaze has a very fine, all-over crackle.

12. **Reclining Cat**, 15th-mid 16th century
1989.34.15

Another piece from a northern kiln is this small figure of a reclining cat. The pinkish clay stoneware is covered with a thick matte celadon glaze. The figure is charmingly modelled. With its feet tucked in and its tail curled along the side of its body, it seems at rest, but the perky ears and round open eyes show that it is also alert. It is so small, less than three inches long, that it could fit nicely in the hand of a small child.

Small figurines of humans or animals were made in all the northern and central kilns perhaps some as toys. But many were certainly made as offerings to the spirits to be placed in Spirit Houses. These little shrines are small wooden or bamboo structures constructed to house the spirits of the land whose natural home had been disturbed by man's intrusiveness. They provide

the spirits with a new home, a place to be fed and cared for so they won't cause mischief because they were displaced.

The spirits are propitiated with these figurines, flowers, incense, and food. This animistic practice exists alongside more formal Buddhist worship not only in the rural north but even in the urban centers of central Thailand. Animals represented as figurines in this exhibition include the turtle, bull, water buffalo, fox, lion, chicken, and the all-important elephant.

13. **Bull and Rider,** 14th-mid 16th century
1989.34.89

This charming figurine of a man riding a bull or water buffalo was made as a child's toy or offering to a spirit house. Produced at the kilns in Si Satchanalai in central Thailand, the figure was simply modelled of the local buff stoneware clay and glazed with an earthy brown iron glaze. After the general shape of the buffalo was formed, details were applied and incised. The dried piece was dipped half way into the vat of glaze, leaving the belly and legs of the beast unglazed.

The water buffalo is perhaps the most important asset of the Thai farmer. It is a strong beast of burden especially adapted to work in the wet, muddy fields in which rice is grown. These powerful but docile animals are often put in the care of children who feed them and ride them to the river to bathe. Once a year in October there are exciting buffalo races in one of the eastern provinces. Cleaned, brushed, and bedecked with red ropes, the buffalo are paraded through the towns before the race. Then, with only the red reins to hang onto and a long stick to prod them along, the young farmers mount the animals and race down a dirt track. It is a raucous affair and not without some danger as riders sometimes fall and the animals run on uncontrolled.

14. **Spouted Bottle (*Kendi*) in the form of a Rooster,** 14th-16th century
1990.154

Spouted water bottles, known as *kendi* are very popular in Southeast Asia. They can come in many sizes and shapes, but essentially they have a rounded body, with a spout on one side and a thin neck opening to a flared mouth on top. Like the taller, more slender Indian *kundika*, which may have

been the ancient inspiration for the first earthenware *kendi* by the Khmers, it can be used for ritual libations and purifications or to hold cool, clean drinking water. When used for drinking, the water is poured from the spout of the *kendi* into one's open mouth, so one's lips never touch the bottle. Most likely one as fancy as this one, made in the shape of a rooster would have been used for ritual purposes. In most cultures water has a religious value. It is recognized as essential to life and growth and also important for cleansing the spirit as well as the body.

The potter who made this *kendi*, which was found in Indonesia, was wonderfully imaginative in the way he transformed the spout into a bird's head, created decorative wing patterns on the body. The potter added a tail which may have served as a handle. The small figure seated behind and embracing the roosters open neck appears to be supported by a kind of rope harness that encircles also the neck of the bird. The buff clay of Si Satchanalai has been covered with a creamy white glaze. The applied and incised arabesque and linear decorations of the wings and tail have been picked out in brown iron glaze.

15. **Male Figure,** 15th -16th century
1990.120

Smaller vessels like this water dropper or incense holder were popular items produced by the kilns at Si Satchanalai. A small number of these are in the form of Chinese figures. In this example, a Chinese-style gentleman holds a fly whisk in his right hand and supports the jar-shaped spout of the bottle on his shoulder with his extra long left arm. He is decoratively painted in black underglaze iron over a white slip.

Chinese merchants have been part of the Thai population since at least the 4th century, since the maritime trade routes between China and the West (used predominantly by the Chinese and Arab traders) meandered along the coastline and through the islands of Southeast Asia. To serve the colonies of Chinese that existed not only in Thailand but also in other parts of the region, vessels like this were made for export as well as for domestic consumption.

16. **Platter with Fish and Arabesque Design,** 15th-16th century
1990-167

Much of the ware produced in the kilns of Sukhothai and Si Satchanalai was made for export. Dishes with fish designs like this one have been found in burial sites in Indonesia and the Philippines. Showing some signs of use they were probably buried after having been kept as treasured heirlooms perhaps for several generations.

This very large platter, about 15 inches in diameter, is rare. There is only one other like it. Its richly painted fish and bands of floral arabesque designs are reminiscent of the compartmentalized decoration on Chinese blue-and-white porcelains, but are more loosely structured and freely painted. One of the peony scrolls seems to emerge from the fish's mouth, while a flower appears to grow from its fin. These fish plates were also produced at the Sukhothai kilns where the designs were even freer and a fish or two may occupy the outer borders as well as the central medallion.

Unlike the Chinese porcelains that probably inspired these wares, the stoneware of Si Satchanalai is a coarse gray clay which has to be covered with a white slip as a ground for the decorative underglaze painting in black iron oxide, which reads gray or almost blue-gray under the translucent overglaze.

17. **Bowl with Everted Rim,** 14th-mid 16th century
1990.109

The incised and combed lotus flower design on the inside of this deep bowl indicate that the bowl may have been used on a Buddhist altar. The lotus is a symbol of purity in both Buddhist and Hindu iconography. The thin, glassy blue-green glaze has pooled at the bottom in a thick layer of glass almost obscuring a second lotus flower engraved there. Horizontal grooves at the rim and base demarcate the cavetto and central medallion areas. There is no decoration on the exterior.

The blue-green glaze is in the family of glazes known as celadons, a type of glaze popular throughout Asia. It was perfected and highly valued in China whose thick, lustrous gray-green celadons set the standard. The glaze is colored by a small percent of iron oxide which is fired in an oxygen-starved, or "reduced," kiln atmosphere to produce this gray-green color. When more

oxygen is present during firing, the same glaze can vary in color from olive green to a pale yellow.

18. **Covered Box with Raptor Design,** 14th-mid 16th century
1989.34.29

Designs of large birds like these raptors are unusual in the decoration of Thai ceramics where most often the wares display foliate or geometric patterns. The handsome and ingenious pattern of parallel lines in black iron underglaze that forms the wings, tail and body of this bird relate closely to some of the geometric designs, however. The artist displays an unerring sense of composition and spacing as he shaped the four bird forms into neat parallelograms which fit together nicely and suggest both stability and movement. As is often the case in the painting of the covered boxes, the design spreads across the break between the lid and body. A series of horizontal rings of varying widths separates the principle design area from the base and top of the box. The slightly flaring foot and the lotus bud knob and ribbed medallion are painted with brown iron glaze.

Like other covered boxes of this type, this piece was excavated in Indonesia. Many like it were found in pristine condition indicating that they were imported for ceremonial use, perhaps even for immediate use in burial rites, rather than for utilitarian purposes.

19. **Gourd-shaped Jar,** 16th-17th century
1989.34.85

This small brown-glazed jarlet is of a type made primarily for export. Perhaps they originally contained oil or spices of some kind. Fatter jarlets with short necks were used in Thailand for storing coconut oil. This modified gourd shape with its narrow neck, flared mouth, and pairs of loop handles, glazed in a simple monochrome brown iron glaze, seems more utilitarian than decorative.

Interestingly, however, these brown jarlets are found in graves in the Philippines placed consistently in an honored position behind the head. It seems that for some reason they held a symbolic value for their owners. The burial practice is described by archaeologist Robert B. Fox: "Thus, Chinese plates were frequently inverted over the pubic area; saucers placed beneath the hands;

and small Sawankalok [Si Satchanalai] jarlets arranged behind the head." (Fox, 1965, pl. 111 and p. 39. Quoted in Tingley, Nancy. *Thai Ceramics: The James and Elaine Connell Collection*, p. 93.)

20. **Miniature Covered Box**, 14th-mid 16th century
1990.144

Miniature boxes and jars were produced in great numbers at the kilns in Si Satchanalai. They were also much favored in Indonesia where many have been discovered. One can imagine the special condiments or perhaps cosmetics that were kept in such tiny containers. This tiny box, for example, is only about an inch tall. Miniature boxes come in two basic shapes: a reliquary shape with its lotus bud knob and a low flaring foot (see slide 18), and a rounded fruit-shaped box with no foot and often a stem-like knob for the lid. On some of each type the decoration spans the lid and body, while on others the decoration of the lid is distinct from that of the body. The lids and bottoms were made and fired together for a smooth, flush fit.

The shape of this miniature box is like that of a delicious fruit native to Thailand called a mangosteen, a small spherical fruit capped by a distinctive four-petal bract below the short stem. Here the lid of the round box is decorated with a fairly realistically modelled set of bracts and stem picked out in brown glaze. The black underglaze geometric design of bands and circles spans the lid and body.

The Elegant Art of Thailand

SLIDE SCRIPT

1. Storage Vessel, Ban Chiang culture, 3rd century BC-2nd century AD

This storage vessel from the Ban Chiang culture of Northeastern Thailand is not very large, only about 7 inches tall. It may have been used to store seeds by the early agricultural people who made it about 2000 years ago. Spirals and striped patterns were the favorite decorations used by these potters. The pots were so special to the people that they were placed in the graves. Some were ritually broken; some were left whole.

2. Five Rollers and One Stamp, Ban Chiang culture, 3rd century BC-2nd century AD.

Archaeologists are wondering if these are beads or tools -- or maybe both. They can be strung as beads but they are quite large. If you rolled one of them over wet clay it would leave a pattern, but there are no clay objects with these patterns on them. Maybe they were rolled in color and then over cloth of some kind to print a design. Cloth rots away so there are no pieces left for us to see. What kind of patterns would these rollers make?

3. Bodhisattva Head, Dvaravati period (7th century)

Because of the influence of Indian civilization, art from later centuries often represent Hindu or Buddhist ideas. So, later Thai artists made many images gods. This is the head of a kind of Buddhist god called a Bodhisattva. Bodhisattvas are kind, loving beings who help all people who pray to them. The head was made out of stucco, a kind of thick plaster, to decorate the wall of a temple.

4. Buddha Seated In Meditation, 13th century

The most important images of the Buddha were made out of bronze and kept inside the temple. The Buddha taught about the importance of meditation. He would sit with his hands in his lap like this for a long periods of time. Does he look calm and peaceful? Do you think it would be a good idea to practice meditation?

Bronze statues like this were made from metal which was heated until it was molten, that is liquid, and then poured into a mold. When the metal had cold and hard, the mold was broken away exposing the shiny metal sculpture. Bronze is a brown to golden color when new. When it is old it gets a green patina, which is a kind of rust.

5. Votive Plaque, 14th-15th century

Followers of the Buddha made pilgrimages to places which were important to the in his life and teaching. Sometimes, at important religious shrines, pilgrims could buy small votive plaques, flat clay or metal tablets with holy images in relief. The pilgrim could take it home as a souvenir or leave it at the temple as an offering to the Buddha.

Do you recognize the Buddha as he sits in meditation? His hand positions tell us that this is the moment in his life when he became enlightened. His right hand reaches forward over his knee to call the earth to witness his right to become enlightened. When the Buddha touched the earth he conquered his demons of fear, passion, power, and greed. It is called the earth-touching gesture.

6. Naga Finial, Sukhothai, 14th-18th century

This imposing beast represents a naga, a powerful dragon-like spirit of the waters. Nagas were important spirits in the countries of Southeast Asia where torrential monsoon rains and flooding rivers happen every year.

The naga has the parts of many different animals: a scaly body, a curly mane, horns, sharp teeth, and short but powerful legs with clawed feet. He also wears a gorgeous jeweled collar.

This sculpture of the head and shoulders of the naga was made of clay to decorate a temple. It was the end piece of the decorative stair railing or doorway arch. The naga's snaky body would have formed the railing or arch. It served as a protector of the holy place and as a bridge between the world of the spirits and the ordinary world.

7. Wat Mahathat, Sukhothai, 14th century

This is a picture of an old temple site in central Thailand. It was built 500 years ago. The buildings are in ruins now. They were made of brick and soft stone blocks and covered with stucco.. In some places the stone was carved with holy figures.

Can you see the large Buddha head in the distance? The figure it belongs to is about 100 feet tall.

The most important structure here was the tall tower that still stands. It represented the center of the universe.

8. Walking Buddha, c. 16th century

Sculptures of the Buddha walking are unique to Thailand. In general, the Walking Buddha signifies the Buddha's many journeys to bring his message to all beings. The Buddha's right hand is raised in the gesture that means "don't worry" or "fear not."

The sculpture is not a portrait of the Buddha as a man, but shows the idea of a holy being, a kind of super hero. Some of the marks of the Buddha that show that he is special are: flat feet with projecting heels, wheel imprints on his palms and soles, a protuberance of his skull (called an *ushnisha*), and a tuft of hair between his eyes (called an *urna*). His legs were like an antelopes, his long arms like the smooth, rounded trunk of an elephant, his head the shape of an egg, and his nose like a parrot's beak. The Thai sculptor has added a flame to the top of his *ushnisha* to represent the radiance of his spiritual energy.

9. Hell Scene from a Buddhist Manuscript, dated 1844

Painting as well as sculpture was used to tell the message of the Buddha. Thai books were long and narrow and the pages were made of palm leaves. The palm leaves were later replaced by accordian-pleated paper. To read this kind of book, you placed it in front of you and open the pages upward.

This book tells the story of Phra Malai, a monk who gained the ability to fly and visit Heaven and Hell because of his devotion and meditation. The picture here shows bad people being tortured in Hell. Can you find Phra Malai in his red robes flying over the scene?

Although the subject is pretty gruesome, the painting is delicate and colorful.

10. Wat Phra Keo, Bangkok, dated 1782

This beautiful, sparkling, colorful temple is about 200 years old. It is still being used. Notice the decoration of the gold nagas on the edge of the roof. The heads are very simplified, not like the detailed clay ones from Sukhothai in slide 6.

Many people go to the temple to worship the Buddha. They bring flowers and fruit and light incense as offerings.

11. Hanging Oil Lamp with Three Handles, 14th-16th century

Clay was also used for numerous small objects made to be used in everyday life. This small, flat ball with a flaring spout is an oil lamp. It was hung by the three little loops on the top. These lamps used a wick like a candle to draw a small amount of oil from inside the lamp to the spout. When the wick was lit it produced a warm, yellow light.

12. Reclining Cat, 15th-mid 16th century

This little cat has its feet tucked in and its tail curled along the side of its body. It seems at rest, but the perky ears and round open eyes show that it is also alert. It is so small, less than three inches long, that it could fit nicely in the hand of a small child.

Small figurines were made perhaps as toys. Many were made to be offerings to the spirits in Spirit Houses. These little shrines are small wooden or bamboo structures constructed to house the spirits of the land whose natural home was disturbed by man. The Spirit Houses provide the spirits with a place to be fed and cared for so they won't cause mischief.

13. Water Buffalo and Rider, 14th-mid 16th century

Here is another toy or offering figurine. It is a man on a water buffalo or bull. It was simply modelled and glazed with an earthy brown iron glaze.

The water buffalo is perhaps the most important asset of the Thai farmer. He is strong beast of burden who can pull a plow through the wet, muddy fields in which rice is grown.

These powerful but docile animals are often put in the care of children who feed them and ride them to the river to bathe. Once a year in October there are exciting buffalo races in one of the eastern provinces.

14. Spouted Bottle (*Kendi*) in the form of a Rooster, 14th-16th century.

This is a water bottle called a *kendi*. It was used for rituals and also for drinking water. When used for drinking, the water is poured into one's open mouth, so one's lips never touch the bottle.

In most cultures water has a religious value. It is recognized as essential to life. We all need water to live. It is important for cleaning the body and also for cleansing the spirit, or purification.

The potter who made this *kendi* was wonderfully imaginative. Look how he created a fat bird from his spouted vessel. He made the spout into a rooster's head and then added wings and a tail. Roosters symbolize power in Southeast Asia. Cockfights are a popular sport there.

15. Male Figure, 15th-16th century.

This small clay water bottle or incense holder is in the shape of a Chinese gentleman. He holds a fly whisk in his right hand and supports a jar (actually the spout of the vessel) on his shoulder with his extra-long left arm. He is decoratively painted in black underglaze designs.

Chinese people lived in Thailand since at least the 4th century. They arrived as traders who travelled between China and India by sea. Thai potters made pieces like this to sell to the Chinese in Thailand or to export overseas to where other Chinese lived.

16. Platter with Fish and Arabesque Design, 15th-16th century

Many ceramics made in Thailand were made for export. It helped the economy of the country. Platters like this one have been found in burial sites in Indonesia and the Philippines. They were probably used for many years before they were buried.

This is an unusually large platter, about 15 inches in diameter. Only two this big have been found, so it is very rare. The designs are orderly, but they are also fun and playful. Look at how the flower seems to grow out of the fish's mouth.

17. Bowl with Everted Rim, 14th-mid 16th century

Some bowls and plates and bottles were covered with painted designs; some were glazed with just one color. They are called monochrome. This monochrome green bowl has a lotus design that was incised and combed into the clay before the glaze was put on. The lotus is an important symbol in Buddhism. Perhaps the bowl was used for offerings to Buddha.

18. Covered Box with Raptor Design, 14th-mid 16th century

The design of an eagle or other raptor (such as hawks or vultures) is unusual in the decoration of Thai ceramics. The artist composed and spaced the four birds well around the pot. The design spreads across the break between the lid and body.

Like other covered boxes of this type, this piece was excavated in Indonesia. It looks like it was never used. Maybe it was imported just for ceremonial use and buried immediately.

19. Gourd-shaped Jarlet, 16th-17th century

This kind of small brown-glazed jarlet was made mostly for export. It may have contained oil or spices of some kind. It copies the shape of a real gourd used as a container.

These brown jarlets were important in burials in the Philippines. In graves they are found placed behind the head of the body.

20. Miniature Covered Box, 14th-mid 16th century

Lots of miniature boxes and jars were made at the kilns in Thailand. Can you imagine that this box is only about one inch high? These tiny boxes and jars were very popular in Indonesia too. Many have been discovered there. Maybe special spices or perhaps cosmetics were kept in them.

This box is in the shape of a delicious fruit native to Thailand called a mangosteen. It has a stem-like knob and four leaves on the lid. The stem and leaves are glazed brown. The round fruit has a black underglaze design of little circles and encircling bands.